

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Thomas Jefferson Memorial

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

West Potomac Park

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Washington, D.C.

VICINITY OF  
CODE

COUNTY

CODE

STATE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☒ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☐ OCCUPIED☒ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☒ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☒ OTHER  
Commemoration**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

National Capital Region

STREET &amp; NUMBER

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington, D.C.

VICINITY OF

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT

☐ GOOD

☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED

☐ RUINS

☐ UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED

☐ ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE

☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Thomas Jefferson Memorial is located in West Potomac Park. It is bordered on the east and south by the approach to the George Mason (14th Street) Bridge and on the north and west by the Tidal Basin. It lies on the approximate axis of Maryland Avenue, directly south of the White House and due east of Arlington House in Virginia.

The Jefferson Memorial was originally designed by John Russell Pope and was later modified by his successor, the architectural firm of Otto R. Eggers and David P. Higgins. The edifice is modeled after the Roman Pantheon, a classical structure especially pleasing to Jefferson which influenced his two most famous buildings, Monticello and the University of Virginia Rotunda.

The Memorial is a circular, open-air monument made of Danby Imperial Vermont limestone, 165' in diameter with a shallow dome and a circular peripteral Ionic colonnade. It stands upon a series of granite stepped terraces laid upon concrete piles carried down to bedrock 80' below the mean low water line of the Tidal Basin. Leading from the Tidal Basin to the structure is a flight of granite steps and platforms, flanked on each side by granite buttresses. The steps lead to an octastyle pedimented portico 102' wide and 45' deep. The triangular pediment, 10' high and standing 62' above the floor, is adorned with a sculpture by Adolph A. Weinman. Weinman's work features the five members of the Declaration of Independence drafting committee submitting their report to Congress. The carving depicts Jefferson standing behind a large table with Benjamin Franklin and John Adams seated to his left, and Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston seated to his right. Surrounding the pediment is a dentiled cornice with egg and dart molding below which lies an unadorned frieze.

The Jefferson Memorial contains 54 unfluted Ionic columns, 26 of which comprise the peristyle. These are 43' tall and 5'3" in diameter and were apparently constructed without entasis. Of the remaining 28 columns, 12 support the north portico while the other 16 columns stand equally divided in each of the Memorial's four openings.

The white Georgia marble interior of the Memorial is dominated by Rudolph Evans' bronze statue of Jefferson which stands in the center of the chamber. Evans' design was chosen in 1938 from a group of 101 in a nationwide competition sponsored by the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Commission. It shows Jefferson in midlife wearing a waistcoat, knee breeches, and a long, fur-collared coat. In his left hand he holds the Declaration of Independence. The present statue replaces an identical plaster model used from 1943 until the end of World War II when the restrictions on the use of metals were lifted and the present bronze cast could be made. The statue is 19' in height and stands on a 6' pedestal of black Minnesota granite.

Adorning the interior of the Memorial are five quotations taken from Jefferson's writings which illustrate the principles to which he dedicated his life. Four of these quotations are inscribed on the walls of the monument. On the southwest wall is an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson's most famous document.

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The Memorial rendition does not coincide with either Jefferson's draft or the final version signed by Congress, alterations in punctuation and wording having been made by the designers to conserve space.

Next to the Declaration of Independence, on the southeast panel, is Jefferson's statement on the evolution of law and the Constitution taken from a letter to Samuel Kercheval in 1816. On the northwest panel is a combination of six quotations taken primarily from his 1786 "Notes on Virginia" and "Summary View" wherein he promulgates his belief in the evils of slavery and the need to educate the masses. On the northwest wall stands the fourth panel, expressing Jefferson's views on freedom of religion. This quotation is taken from the "Act of Religious Freedom" adopted in 1779, which eliminated the state church in Virginia.

The fifth and final passage comes from a letter which Jefferson wrote to Benjamin Rush in the year 1800:

I HAVE SWORN UPON THE ALTAR OF GOD ETERNAL HOSTILITY  
AGAINST EVERY FORM OF TYRANNY OVER THE MIND OF MAN.

No single sentence captures the essence of Jefferson's character as does this statement which now stands engraved on the frieze encircling the Memorial interior, a lasting tribute to its author.

Above the frieze lies a dentiled cornice and the massive Indiana limestone dome which stands 103' above the floor below. The dome interior is divided into two parts: the lower region having a coffered surface containing lights for the statue, and the upper region which has a smooth surface and is uninterrupted by electrical fixtures.

Since its dedication in 1943, the Jefferson Memorial has experienced only one significant alteration apart from the replacement of the plaster-cast statue with one of bronze. This alteration occurred in the years directly preceding the American Bicentennial in 1976. At this time a small giftshop was installed in the northwest section of the Memorial where a storage room once stood. In addition, a handicapped access ramp was installed in the building, leading from the northwest part of the building to a sidewalk on the western side of the edifice.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
	__ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__ COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__ RELIGION	
__ PREHISTORIC			__ LAW	__ SCIENCE	
__ 1400-1499	__ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__ CONSERVATION	__ LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
__ 1500-1599	__ AGRICULTURE	__ ECONOMICS	__ MILITARY	__ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
__ 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	__ EDUCATION	__ MUSIC	__ THEATER	
__ 1700-1799	__ ART	__ ENGINEERING	__ PHILOSOPHY	__ TRANSPORTATION	
__ 1800-1899	__ COMMERCE	__ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	__ COMMUNICATIONS	__ INDUSTRY		Commemoration	
		__ INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1937-1943 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Russell Pope, Architect  
Rudolph Evans, Sculptor

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Thomas Jefferson Memorial, designed after the Pantheon of Rome, is significant as America's foremost memorial to her third president, as an original adaptation of Neoclassical architecture, and as a key landmark in the monumental core of Washington, D.C., in accordance with the McMillan Commission plan of 1901.

In 1934 Congress created the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Commission (TJMC). Its chairman was New York Representative Hon. John J. Boylan, who had offered the resolution establishing the Commission. That same year the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) was considering possible sites for the monument which at this point was still intended to take the form of a statue. Nearly all of the major site proposals would have placed the statue along the Washington Monument-Capitol axis. Among the sites considered were ones at Lincoln Park, the terminus of East Capitol Street, and various places along the Mall itself. The site chosen, however, was located next to the Tidal Basin, at the intersection of the White House and Maryland Avenue axes. This spot had been marked as the site of a great memorial by the McMillan Commission as early as 1901. The McMillan Commission envisioned a grand structure on the scale of the White House, Washington Monument, and Lincoln Memorial; either one large monument to a single individual or a pantheon in which statues of various American heroes would be displayed. In the 1920s this site was suggested as the location of a monument to Theodore Roosevelt. The Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Committee went so far as to hold a design competition before the project faltered.

In 1937, the TJMC chose John Russell Pope as the architect of the Memorial. In the spirit of the McMillan Plan of 1901, Pope's design called for a monolithic pantheon of large dimensions facing north toward the White House. The Tidal Basin was to be transformed into a series of reflecting pools flanked by rectangular terraces outlined with formal rows of trees.

The CFA and the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (NCPPC) brought forth a number of objections to this scheme. First, the very grandeur of the structure and grounds would so dominate the vista that they would upset the balance of the Capital's monumental core. Second, they argued, the remodeling of the Tidal Basin would diminish its capability to flush the Washington Channel. Third, the elaborate landscaping would necessitate fundamental changes in the street design, causing disruptions in the flow of traffic to Virginia. Finally, the landscaping plan required the destruction of 80 elms and each of the 1200 cherry trees which surrounded the Tidal Basin.

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Accordingly, the CFA and the NCPPC called for alterations in the plan. Their objections were addressed to Daniel P. Higgins and Otto R. Eggers, who became the Memorial architects upon the untimely death of Pope in August 1937. Higgins and Eggers sought to mitigate the adverse effects in two ways. First, they planned to move the monument 600' south of its original site and to decrease the size of the structure for compatibility with the other monuments. Second, they proposed to forgo Pope's designs for elaborate landscaping, thus leaving the Tidal Basin, the street plan, and the majority of cherry trees largely intact.

Although these changes went far in pacifying the opponents of the plan, many members of the CFA still objected to the Pantheon design of the Memorial, favoring instead an open peristyle design. This change, however, met the resistance of the TJMC which took its case directly to President Franklin D. Roosevelt who ordered the construction to begin, thus overriding the authority of the CFA.

The CFA's appeal to Congress fell on deaf ears and on December 15, 1938, the ground-breaking took place. Hundreds of spectators watched as TJMC member Stuart G. Gibboney turned the first spadeful of dirt with the same shovel used to break ground at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and at the Lincoln Memorial. Construction began in earnest the following year with John McShain, Inc. of Philadelphia as the contractor. Frederick Law Olmstead of Massachusetts was chosen as the consulting landscape architect.

On November 15, 1939, a ceremony was held in which President Roosevelt laid the cornerstone of the Memorial. In it were placed copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the 1939 TJMC Report, the 10 volume "Writings of Thomas Jefferson" by Paul Leicester Ford, Jefferson's "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," and one edition each of four prominent Washington, D.C., newspapers.

Within months the superstructure began to take shape and sculptors were selected for the monument's carvings. In August 1940 the TJMC contracted Adolph A. Weinman to make a carving for the north portico pediment, and six months later it chose Rudolph Evans to sculpt the statue of Jefferson. On April 13, 1943, the bicentennial of Jefferson's birth, all was in place and the Memorial was dedicated.

Each year the Jefferson Memorial plays host to various ceremonies, including annual Memorial exercises, Easter Sunrise Services, and the ever-popular Cherry Blossom Festival. The Jefferson Memorial is administered and maintained by the National Park Service.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Goode, James M. The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974.
- Kohler, Sue A. The Commission of Fine Arts, a Brief History 1910-1976. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977.
- McClure, James R. The Thomas Jefferson Memorial. Alexandria, Virginia: Action Publications, 1949.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 14  
UTM REFERENCES

ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A 1,8	3 2,3 4,4,0	4,3 0,5 4,9,0
c 1,8	3 2,3 1,6,0	4,3 0,5 2,0,0

ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
B 1,8	3 2,3 4,4,0	4,3 0,5 2,0,0
D 1,8	3 2,3 1,6,0	4,3 0,5 4,9,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Thomas Jefferson Memorial is located in West Potomac Park. It is bordered on the east and south by the approach to the George Mason (14th Street) Bridge and on the north and west by the Tidal Basin. It lies on the approximate axis of Maryland Avenue, directly south of the White House and due east of Arlington House in Virginia.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Donald C. Pfanz, Clerk-typist

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service, National Capital Region

STREET & NUMBER

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

CITY OR TOWN

Washington, D.C. 20242

DATE

January 12, 1981

TELEPHONE

202-426-6660

STATE

## 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

N/A NOT A NOMINATION; DOCUMENTATION OF  
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION EXISTING REGISTER  
PROPERTY

YES

NO

NONE

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is    National    State    Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER